

# The New York Times

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June 21, 2007

## Mr. Bush's Stem Cell Diversion

EDITORIAL

The executive order on stem cells issued by President Bush yesterday seeks to reorient research in new directions that may or may not pay off. But make no mistake, it is no substitute for the bill expanding embryonic stem cell research that Mr. Bush vetoed at the same time because it would involve the destruction of microscopic entities — smaller than the period at the end of this sentence — that the president deems a nascent form of life.

Both the Senate and the House, which passed the embryonic stem cell bill by comfortable but not veto-proof margins, need to summon the strength to override Mr. Bush's veto, so that important research into possible cures for Parkinson's, diabetes and other serious ailments can move ahead.

Mr. Bush knows that most Americans support embryonic stem cell research — while his political base does not — so yesterday he sought to at least blunt their dismay by touting new scientific studies focused on deriving potent stem cells from amniotic fluid, placentas and the skin of laboratory mice. Some of the alternative work is indeed promising. But almost all scientists in the field consider embryonic stem cell research the most promising. It is foolish to crimp that research by withholding federal funds to placate a minority of religious and social conservatives, including Mr. Bush, who deem the work unethical.

The president's executive order directs the secretary of health and human services to support research on alternative sources of "pluripotent" stem cells that are capable of developing into many other kinds of cells needed for therapy. The department already supports a lot of such experiments — on so-called adult stem cells. It has now been ordered to also explore the potential of deriving embryonic stem cells without killing embryos — perhaps from embryos that are deemed dead or from specially created biological entities that are not full embryos.

The feasibility of deriving embryonic stem cells that way will need fuller discussion. Making the order even less persuasive, the White House did not request any additional funding to carry out the work, but will simply use existing budgets at the National Institutes of Health.

The bill vetoed by Mr. Bush would have provided more research opportunities: greatly expanding the number of traditional embryonic stem cell lines that can be used in federally financed research by tapping into the thousands of surplus embryos that would otherwise be discarded at fertility clinics. If Mr. Bush cannot see the sense in such an approach, members of Congress need to tell him that they — and the American people — do.

The Senate, which has the best shot at overriding the veto, will vote first, in hopes that a victory there will inspire the House to follow. Americans will need to keep a close eye on which legislators favor the most promising stem cell research and which try to impede scientific progress.